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THE SOUTHWEST BOUNDARY OF TEXAS.

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As no State of the American Union can compare with Texas in extent of territory, so no State has greater historical interest and importance attached to its boundaries. From the time when La Salle made his unfortunate landing upon its coast until the Supreme Court made its recent decision concerning Greer county, the limits of Texas have been unsettled. Disputes arising from this fact have been the cause of costly *entradas*, of interminable wrangling by colonial officials, of long and fruitless diplomatic correspondence terminating in unsatisfactory compromise, and of hostile expeditions ending in overwhelming defeat or inglorious victory. The intensity of feeling aroused by these disputes has threatened to disrupt the Union itself, and their solution has prefigured the destiny of the whole continent.

The most interesting and important of the boundaries of Texas is that on the southwest. Neither the eastern, the scene of a century's wrangle between Spanish and French, of the "neutral ground" agreement of 1806, and of the unsatisfactory treaty of 1819; nor the far northwestern, linked with memories of the ill-fated Santa Fé expedition and of the stirring days of the compromise of 1850, can compare with it in the number and variety of questions involved in their settlement. A direct, although possibly

secondary, cause of the only war waged by the American people for territorial aggrandizement,¹ it has marked for more than half a century the advance line of Anglo-Saxon domination upon this continent. In view of its past importance and of its present significance, a survey of its development, from a somewhat different standpoint than the usual one, may be not only admissible, but profitable.

For this survey, it must be acknowledged that the documents are neither so numerous nor so weighty as would be desirable; nor is the reason for this hard to discover. Previous to the revolt of Mexico from Spain the frontier settlements were so widely separated from each other that it was not necessary to limit strictly the boundaries of the provinces in which they were established. Nevertheless, there was a sort of delimitation in every case, and it is the aim of the writer to trace briefly this delimitation, in order to show its bearing upon subsequent boundary claims.

By the end of the seventeenth century the northeastern provinces of Nueva España were Nuevo Mexico, Nueva Vizcaya (Chihuahua), Nueva Estremadura (Coahuila), and Nuevo Reino de Leon. Texas had been visited and portions of it traversed by exploring parties during the two previous centuries; and more recently, during the closing years of the seventeenth century, it had been the scene of three *entradas*, which mark the true beginning of Texas history. But a quarter century was to elapse before the territory should be raised to the dignity of a compound name and of a separate provincial government. A half century was to pass, before the last of the provinces bordering on Texas, Nuevo Santander (Tamaulipas), was to be pacified and organized. The four provinces first named at that time constituted the frontier buffer provinces, opposing the tribes of savages then wandering at will over the territory of Nuevo Santander and Texas.

Of the rivers destined to play an important part in the ultimate settlement of the boundaries of these provinces, the most important is the Rio Grande. This river rises in Colorado and flows southward through New Mexico, where it bore, in the days when the

¹With this statement and others of similar drift in this article the reader should compare the argument of Judge Fulmore in *The Annexation of Texas and the Mexican War*. THE QUARTERLY, V 28-48.—EDITOR QUARTERLY.

Spanish first became familiar with it, the name of "Rio del Norte." In its middle course it was called the "Rio Grande"; while further towards its mouth, where it flowed through the country inhabited wholly by wild Indians (*Indios bravos*), it took the name of "Rio Bravo," or sometimes, doubtless from color of its water, that of "Rio Turbio."¹ The second of these rivers in importance is the Nueces, crossed and named in the *entrada* of General Alonzo de Leon in 1689.² Two years later, at the time of the *entrada* of Domingo Teran, the name of the river was changed to San Diego.³ By the time of Ramon's expedition, in 1716, the name of Rio de las Nueces⁴ had been restored, and it remained thenceforth the designation of the stream. The third most important river, the Medina, was also named during the expedition of Alonzo de Leon. The day before the arrival of his command at the Nueces, he makes mention of an "*Arte de Navegar*," which was written by "el Maestro Medina."⁵ Whether there was any connection between the name of the master navigator and that of the river is uncertain; but, at any rate, the river was named during this expedition. Of the three, the Medina is the smallest, and yet for more than a century it was designated as the official boundary between Texas and Coahuila, while the one next in importance, the Nueces, was to answer the same purpose for the provinces of Nuevo Santander and Texas. The largest of the three, the Rio Grande, plays no part in the determination of boundaries, so long as Spanish or Mexican authorities control the limits of the provinces concerned. To one familiar with the natural advantages of the Rio Grande as a boundary, it must seem strange that it was not at once selected as the divisional line between Texas and its southern neighbors. To this principle of the selection of natural delimitations, two things were opposed: first, the Spanish method of limiting frontier provinces; and, second, the conquest and pacification of Nuevo Santander, in 1748, by General José

¹Altamira, *Testimonio de un Parceer*, in Yoakum's *History of Texas*, I 385. *Discovery of the Bay of Espiritu Santo*, THE QUARTERLY, II 254.

²Derrotero de Alonzo de Leon, 3 *rta.*, in *Colección de Memorias de Nueva España*, 27

³Teran, *Descripcion y Diaria Demarcacion*, etc., 26 *rta.*, *ibid.*

⁴Informe de Domingo Ramon, 144, *ibid.*

⁵See note 2. Also No. 28088, Bulletin Trimestriel. No. 27, Juin-Juillet 1901. Librairie Ch. Chadenat, Paris.

Escandón. The former affected the boundary with Coahuila, and the latter that with the newly pacified province.

When these new provinces were formed from territory formerly occupied by Indians, it seems to have been the policy of the authorities of Nueva España to limit in a general way the boundaries of each with its neighbors, on the south, west, and east, so far as it had neighbors, while on the north they indicated no more definite confines than those afforded by the "many barbarous nations," or the "gentile Indians."¹ Such we may conceive to have been the early method of designating the northern boundaries of Nueva Vizcaya and Nueva Estremadura. From the former province the line of growth to the north led by way of the Rio Grande valley. From the latter the march of Spanish civilization moved across the Rio Grande, the Nueces, the Medina, and so on towards the east. As the province of Nueva Vizcaya became too extended for a single government, a new one, Nuevo Mexico, was formed; and, likewise, with the extension of Coahuila, Texas assumed the dignity of a separate province under military rule. The question of the southern boundary of each of these new provinces was easily determined. The southernmost garrison of Nuevo Mexico was that of the royal *presidio* of the Pass (El Paso). This was immediately upon the Rio Grande del Norte; therefore, that river, as it begins to turn towards the east at that point, should constitute the boundary between Nuevo Mexico and Nueva Vizcaya. For the time it would be unnecessary to define the boundaries at any other point, because the only settlements were in the Rio Grande valley, around the rude civilization of which stretched a desert, not merely of sand, but also of savagery.

The settlement of the new province of Texas or Nuevas Filipinas² nearest the City of Mexico was the *presidio* of San Antonio

¹The former is the designation for the northern limit of Texas, in *Memorias de Nueva España*, **28** 162 *vta.*, and the latter for the western, northern, and eastern of Nuevo Mexico, in Altamira's *Testimonio de un Paracer*. See Yoakum, I 385.

²The double name appears February 9, 1716, in *Relacion del Sargento Mayor Don Martin de Alarcón*, *Memorias de Nueva España*, **27** 444 *vta.* In *Representacion hecha por los R. R. Pads Misioneros*, July 22, 1716, *Memorias de Nueva España*, **27** 163 *vta.*, occurs this expression. "We have conceived, most excellent Sir, great hopes that this province will be a New Philippine (Nueva Filipina)."

de Bexar, founded in 1718,¹ as a protection to the mission on the San Antonio river. The small garrison at this point could control, in a fairly satisfactory manner, the country as far west as the next important natural dividing line, the Medina river. This, accordingly, would be taken as the southwest boundary of the new province. By 1700 Coahuila had extended her military posts near to the right bank of the Rio Grande, where the *presidio* of San Juan Bautista was established. A few years later her missions were also established upon the left bank.² Thus both banks of the Rio Grande belonged to Coahuila by right of actual settlement, and the unoccupied territory between the Rio Grande and the Medina seems to have been transferred to her bodily, as being the older province. The Medina is distinctly called the boundary line between the two provinces, April 4, 1721, by the Marqués de Aguayo. Very likely it had been so designated previous to his journey, or this would not have been stated so simply, without some word of explanation; as, to quote his words, "entering the province of the Texas, Nuevas Filipinas, which the river Medina divides from the province of Coahuila, Nueva Estremadura."³ Such a statement from the man who was governor of both provinces may be regarded as both disinterested and official. In a similar manner, doubtless by right of previous independent organization, Nueva Vizcaya and Nuevo Mexico extended their territory far east of the Rio Grande, and for more than a century and a quarter their claims were recognized by the Spanish authorities of Texas, as well as those of the other immediate provinces and of the general government. Thus Texas was to remain shut away from the upper Rio Grande, until a force stronger than documentary evidence should enter into the solution of the question.

The fact has been mentioned that the Medina was called the

¹Talamantes, *Historia . . . de Texas hasta el año de 1730*, Par. 22. *Historia* 43, Archivo General.

²This was the case of Mision de San Francisco Solano, afterwards transferred to the San Antonio and renamed Mision de San Antonio de Valero. Talamantes, Par. 22. Portilla: *Apuntes para la Historia Antigua de Coahuila y Texas*, 292 *et seq.*

³*Diario del Viaje de Marqués de San Miguel de Aguayo in Memorias de Nueva España*, 28 11. It is interesting to note how the simpler native name of the province has survived in each of these two cases, as well as in most of the others.

boundary between Texas and Coahuila by the Marqués de Aguayo in the account of his expedition in 1721. Other writers bear similar testimony during this early period. The evidence they present is of two kinds; that the Medina is the boundary between the two provinces in question, and that the Rio Grande flows through territory wholly within other provinces than Texas. In speaking of the province of Coahuila, the Marqués de Altamira says,¹ "Next to Nuevo Reino de Leon comes the province and subject people [*governacion*] of Coahuila or Nueva Estremadura, in length from south to north more than a hundred and twenty leagues, to the river of Medina, where begins the adjacent last province and subject people [*governacion*] of ours of Texas or Nuevas Filipinas." In speaking of the territory between the Rio Grande and the San Antonio, he says,² "From the said *presidio* of San Juan Bautista of the Rio Grande to that of San Antonio de Bejar or Valero (which latter is six leagues within the province of Texas), there intervene another seventy leagues without a single settlement in all their circumference." The distance from the Medina to the *presidio* of San Antonio is uniformly given as six leagues; thus it will be observed that sixty-four leagues, or a full half of the length of Coahuila, lay on the left side of the Rio Grande. Again, in describing Texas itself, he says,³ "From the said river of Medina at which begins the said province of Texas to the *presidio* de los Adays at which it ends, its length from south to north is about two hundred and forty leagues, and its width from the west to the Mexican Gulf about eighty." Thus he makes three different statements about the boundary of Texas and in all of them the Medina is expressly mentioned.

In describing the course of the Rio Grande he shows with equal clearness that no part of it touches territory belonging to Texas. His description of the course of the river is interesting.⁴ "From this province of Nuevo Mexico descends the river named del Norte, which, coming directly towards the south, runs close to the said capital of Santa Fé, and to the royal *presidio* of the Pass, which

¹*Testimonio de un Parccer*. Yoakum, I 384.

²*Ibid.*, 387.

³*Ibid.*, 389.

⁴*Ibid.*, 385.

has been mentioned. Afterwards it turns to the east and cuts off a portion of Nueva Vizcaya, whence it receives the Concho river. It traverses then the middle portion of the province of Coahuila, passing three leagues beyond its *presidio* of San Juan Bautista, called from it that of the Rio Grande.¹ * * * It continues still to the east, crossing twenty leagues beyond the frontier of the said Nuevo Reino, and from its *presidio* of Serralvo, it discharges its waters with the name of Rio Bravo, through lands of gentile Indians unknown to us." This description was written four years before the pacification of Nuevo Santander began. It will be observed that the Rio Grande, under its various names, is represented as passing through Nuevo Mexico, Nueva Vizcaya, and Coahuila, while it is twenty leagues distant from the nearest *presidio* of Nuevo Leon, the smallest of these provinces, with a length of one hundred leagues and a width of about twenty. This fact is important in determining the later boundaries of this province, after the conquests of Escandón in Nuevo Santander. Nuevo Leon, today, remains shut off from the Rio Grande by its neighbors, Coahuila and Tamaulipas, while Texas, then in the same condition, has acquired nearly all of the left bank of that river, and has received more than an equitable compensation for the remainder.

The authorities already quoted seem of sufficient official weight to form the basis for a tolerably certain opinion; but, in addition, it is possible to quote the testimony of the cosmographer of the Kingdom of New Spain. His utterances concerning the boundaries of Texas and Coahuila are equally as definite as those above quoted. "This extensive country [Texas]² has its beginning from the river of Medina, which is the dividing line between the province of Coahuila and the former, which extends between the north and east, in the direction of northeast, for more than two hundred and twenty leagues in length, and more than seventy in width." * * * Nueva Estremadura follows to the north-northwest of Nuevo Reino

¹See note 2, p. 86.

²D. Joseph Antonio de Villa Señor y Sanchez, *Theatro Americano*, II 320. The author is described as "Contador General de la Real Contaduria de Azogues, y Cosmographo de este Reyno," and the work was written by order of the viceroy, Fuen-Clara. The first volume appeared in 1746, and the second two years later. (See Cavo, *Tres Siglos de Mexico*.)

de Leon, and its boundaries run to the river of Medina, which is its terminus for the north."¹

By comparing the dimensions of Texas, as given above, with those previously given for Coahuila and Nuevo Leon, it will be seen that they are far broader. Nueva Vizcaya at the same time had a length of about one hundred and eighty leagues, while the distance from the royal *presidio* of El Paso to Santa Fé allowed a length of about one hundred and thirty leagues only for New Mexico,² the scattered settlements of which were hemmed in by unsubdued Indians. Although the extensive province of Texas at that time contained only four widely scattered settlements,³ all writers agree in stating that its resources were sufficient to maintain a vast population. So it follows that, even if restricted to the Medina as its western boundary, it possessed more territory, and territory of a greater value, than any of its neighbors.

From the above excerpts it will be seen that three Spanish officials, high in authority, had in the course of twenty-five years previous to 1748, made separate statements concerning the southwest boundary of Texas, and that all had concurred in placing it at the Medina. It seems only reasonable to say that we are justified in assuming that this river was the officially recognized boundary, at that time, between Texas and Coahuila, and that this delimitation was commonly accepted by the people of the two provinces.⁴ It remains only to fix the boundaries of Texas below the province of Coahuila. This question was settled by the pacification of the savage Indians of the coast, by General José Escandón, between the years 1748 and 1755. Texas acquired a new neighbor, Nuevo Santander; a new limit in that quarter, the Nueces; and her western boundary, at least for a Spanish province, may be regarded as fairly complete.

The *junta general* of war and finance had authorized Escandón to conquer "a hundred leagues or more from south to north and about seventy or eighty from east to west on the coast of the Mexi-

¹*Theatro Americano*, II 306.

²Altamira, Yoakum, I 384.

³*Theatro Americano*, II 320.

⁴Yoakum, I 77, says, "At this period the Medina seems to be well understood as the western limit of Texas."

can Gulf, occupied by the many barbarous, gentile, and apostate nations." Possibly these dimensions were not to be closely adhered to, and, indeed, it is doubtful if the government authorities in Mexico knew precisely what territory the above distances would include. In order to make the matter more certain they defined the limits of the new province by means of those already existing. On the north the territory to be conquered by Escandón was to be limited "by the kingdom of the aforesaid government of Coahuila and the beginning of the province of Texas."¹

In December, 1748, Escandón left Querétaro to accomplish his mission, with a force of seven hundred and fifty, afterwards increased to twenty-five hundred by levies from various parts of Nueva España, including Nuevo Leon and Coahuila. His expedition was not wholly warlike, for he was to found missions and villages, wherever the situation or the people promised success to the venture. Before starting out he had selected such places as he could from the data in his possession, and had marked them on a map. This map was approved by the authorities who had authorized his expedition, and it worth while to note that a place for a settlement had been designated on the left bank of both the Nueces and the San Antonio. Thus it was clearly implied that in order to extend his territory to the confines of Texas, he must conquer the territory beyond the Rio Grande.²

A very important reason for the extension of Escandón's conquests beyond the Rio Grande was the fact that a strip of territory about two hundred leagues wide, through which the river ran, was the favorite hunting ground of the Apaches and Lipans, forming "a pouch (*bolsa*) of land between New Mexico, Texas, and Coahuila"³ and extending nearly to the mouth of the Rio Grande. The authorities of Nuevo Leon and Coahuila either could not subdue these savages, or else had not taken the trouble to do so. Escandón's expedition offered a fitting opportunity to accomplish this necessary preliminary to the settlement of this vast region. In his first plan for the conquest of Nuevo Santander, he had proposed

¹Prieto, *Historia, Geografica y Estadística del Estado de Tamaulipas*, 40. The author says that the above extracts were taken from *Colección de Memorias de Nueva España*, 29.

²*Ibid.*, 135 note.

³Carta of Ximenes, *Colección de Memorias de Nueva España*, 28 199.

the founding of fourteen settlements, three of which were to be beyond the Rio Grande. The royal *audiencia* of the City of Mexico approved of his plans, amplified his powers, and gave him permission to found the new settlements.¹ Already, in 1749, he had sent a detachment of his forces from Coahuila across the Rio Bravo at San Juan Bautista, with orders to proceed to the mouth of the Nueces and the bay of Espíritu Santo. He also gave orders to Captain Bastera, then in command of the troops at that point, to proceed to form a settlement at a suitable place on the left bank of the Nueces.² He also proposed to remove the *presidio* from the bay of Espíritu Santo near to Camargo, where it would be more useful against the warlike Lipans and Apaches. By the next year, however, Escandón learned that the place selected on the Nueces was not suitable for a settlement, and after eight months of hardships, the prospective settlers were located below the Rio Bravo, where they formed the villa of Soto la Marina.³

In sending this expedition beyond the Rio Grande, Escandón had, in a measure, exercised control over the territory crossed, and with the approval of the Mexican authorities, although not to the extent of actual settlement. The latter was accomplished indirectly by him through private enterprise. In 1750 there was established, on the left bank of the Rio Grande, a *hacienda* of considerable importance, called Dolores. The founder of this, Don José Vasquez Borrego, on learning of Escandón's conquests and that his settlement was within the limits assigned the latter, presented himself to that leader in the villa Santander and offered his co-operation in subduing the territory on the far side of the Bravo. Escandón accepted his offer, appointed him captain and administrator of that portion of the colony, and gave him fifty *sitios* of land for pasturage. Four years later the settlement, Dolores, had a population of a hundred and twenty-five.⁴

Towards the end of 1754, another *hacendado* of Coahuila, Don Tomás Sánchez by name, crossed the Bravo and established himself about ten leagues to the north of Dolores. Sánchez also proposed

¹Prieto, 160, 161.

²Ibid., 135.

³Ibid., 167.

⁴Ibid., 175.

to Escandón to found a new pueblo on the left bank of that river, in a place he had selected. Escandón agreed to this, but as he had previously attempted a settlement on the Nueces, he wished Sánchez first to undertake one there. Sánchez visited the Nueces, but returning reported to Borrego, at Dolores, that he could not find a suitable place for a settlement, and that unless he could form his settlement on the Bravo, he should desist entirely from the enterprise. Borrego, to whom Escandón had left the ultimate decision, then permitted Sánchez to form his settlement in the desired locality. Thus, May 15, 1755, was founded the villa of Laredo, ten leagues from Dolores.¹

In this manner was accomplished the pacification and settlement of the colony of Nuevo Santander. In 1755 Escandón retired to Querétaro, there to make out a statistical report of all that he had done and of the places founded by him.² By his vigorous work he had extended his conquests, not only along the coast of the gulf of Mexico, but also up both banks of the Bravo, so that the limits of his colony touched Coahuila on the west, near the villa of Laredo, and Texas on the north, with the Nueces as the accepted boundary line, officially established by a royal *cédula* of 1805. By extending his conquests into the Apache country, although by no means entirely subduing the Indians, together with the founding of the settlements mentioned above, he had effectually deprived Nuevo Leon of territory bordering on the Rio Grande, and had made one less neighbor for Texas on the southwest.

The remaining years of Spanish domination brought no special changes in the boundaries of Texas, the documentary evidence of this period simply confirming the limits already roughly laid down. A letter of 1762 thus describes them: "This vast province of Texas is found at a distance of three hundred and sixty leagues, more or less, from the City of Mexico, on a line drawn to the north-northeast; it borders on the south the colony of the Mexican Gulf, although there remains on this and other boundaries much uninhabited land. On the west-southwest [it borders] the province of Coahuila: on the west-northwest, Sonora [Chihuahua?]; on the

¹Prieto, 188.

²Ibid., 189. This report is found in Sección de Historia, 55, Archivo General, City of Mexico.

northwest, Nuevo Mexico. On the north it is not found to have other confines than those of the many barbarous nations”¹

In 1767 and 1768 Fr. Gaspar José de Solís made a *visita* to the missions of the province of Texas. In the course of his travels along the Rio Grande he had occasion to send some Indians who were without instruction in the holy faith to the curate of the villa of Laredo. On the following day he arrived at the *hacienda* Dolores of Don Joseph Borrego, on the bank of the Rio del Norte, which *hacienda* “belongs to the government of Nuevo Santander of the Mexican Gulf.”² At the time of a later visit to the Rio Grande, the same year, 1768, he speaks of Laredo as a “foundation of Colonel Don Joseph Escandón, belonging to the government of Nuevo Santander.”

The *Breve Compendio* of Bonilla is justly regarded as one of the best authorities upon the early history of Texas. In this work the Medina is represented as the place where the government of Coahuila ends and that of Texas begins. The length of the latter province is given as about two hundred and forty leagues and its width as eighty.³

Another important work for early Texas history is Morfi's *Memorias para la Historia de Tejas*. In this the extent and boundaries of the province are thus given:

“It is distant from Mexico about three hundred and sixty leagues, more or less, to the north-northeast. On the south it begins at the bay of Espíritu Santo, which is, with little variation, in 33 degrees north latitude, and extends to the north as far as the town of San Teodoro de los Taovayas, occupying a space of more than two hundred and fifty leagues from north to south. It has the same or a little greater extent from east to west, from the river Medina, which separates it from Coahuila as far as the abandoned *presidio* de los Adaes, where it joins Louisiana. It is bounded on the south by the gulf of Mexico; on the east by Louisiana and English colonies; on the north, north-northwest, and northwest by Nuevo Mexico and unexplored lands; and on the west by the provinces of Coa-

¹Carta de Fr. Francisco Xavier Ortiz, 1762, *Memorias de Nueva España*, 162 *vta.*

²See his *Diario*, Historia, **27** 253 and *vta.*, also 295.

³*Breve Compendio*, Par. 1, Historia, **27** 1 and *vta.*

huila, Nuevo Reino de Leon, and [the] colony of Santander.”¹ In speaking of the rivers, Morfi says, “The river Medina, the dividing boundary between the provinces of Coahuila and Texas, has its source in the same direction. * * * It runs twenty-seven leagues and unites with the San Antonio.”²

Father Morfi had gathered the material for his work upon Texas in the course of a tour of inspection in company with the commanding general of the recently created Provincias Internas. In the course of their journey, they cross the various rivers forming the boundaries of Texas, and he thus describes them:

“The river de las Nueces rises in the canyon of San Saba, runs north and south, with some inclination to the east, until it is united with the Frio river, in whose company it empties into the Mexican Gulf, about one hundred leagues from the mouth of the Rio Grande and twenty from that of the San Antonio, and scarcely touching the colony of Nuevo Santander. It forms the dividing line of that province and that of Texas. * * * The founding of a settlement upon the banks of this river, in the most suitable place, would be a matter of great importance, equally for the correspondence of the provinces of Texas and Coahuila, situated as it is midway between them, as well as for impeding the Lipan and Comanche Indians from the free entrance which this desert country of eighty leagues offers them, to Nuevo Reino de Leon and the colony of Santander, where they have already committed various outrages.”³

The language of the above extract is rather ambiguous in one respect. In speaking of a new settlement on the Nueces does the worthy friar imply that he considered the Nueces a better boundary for Coahuila and Texas than the Medina, then recognized as such? At any rate he joins in with the others in giving the Medina as the boundary in the following words:

¹Bk. I, Par. 2. This work has never been published.

²Ibid. The mistake of the worthy Father in saying that Nuevo Leon touched the western boundary of Texas is a natural one for a traveler to make in considering the relative position of these provinces as viewed from the South. It has already been explained why Nuevo Leon did not extend to the Texas border.

³Morfi. *Viaje de Indios y Diario del Nuevo Mexico*, 452, in *Documentos para la Historia de Mexico*, 2nd series, vol. I.

"At half-past one we arrived at the river of Medina, the divisional line of the provinces of Coahuila and Texas."¹

The *comandante general* of the Provincias Internas, the Caballero de Croix, thus expresses himself concerning the Nueces boundary:

"The *presidio* of Bahía del Espíritu Santo with the mission of the same name, and that of Rosario constitute the second jurisdiction of this province [Texas], which is found upon the coast of the Mexican Gulf [extending] from the mouth of the river Nueces, which separates it from the colony of Nuevo Santander."²

As both of these provinces were in the jurisdiction of the *comandante*, he could have no motive for extending or retrenching the boundaries of either. His testimony, therefore, would be even stronger than that of Father Morfi and other writers wholly unconnected with the provinces.

In 1787 there came a report from an expedition sent to explore the coasts of Nuevo Santander. It recommended the establishment of a post at the mouth of the Rio Grande, for the encouragement of the settlement of that region. It mentions the fact that the expedition had visited Camargo, Laredo, and other towns in the colony of Nuevo Santander.³ The correspondent remits a map to the viceroy, but unfortunately this map, as is generally the case with those drawn to illustrate Spanish documents, does not, at the present time, accompany the report.

With so much external evidence concerning the boundaries of the province, it would be strange if none could be produced from within Texas itself. However, even this is not lacking. In 1770, the *cabildo* and residents of San Fernando (the nucleus of the modern San Antonio) made a representation of their grievous situation to Governor Ripperdá, in which appears the following statement:

"This province is composed of nine missions and four *presidios*
* * * whose jurisdiction starts from the river of Medina, which

¹Morfi, *Viaje de Indios y Diario del Nuevo Mexico*, 457.

²Report of de Croix, Chihuahua, September 23, 1778, in *Expediente Sobre Comercio*, Historia **43**, Archivo General.

³El Conde de la Sierra Gorda to Viceroy Flores, June 19, 1787, Historia **43**, Archivo General.

divides it from that of Coahuila, and runs more than two hundred leagues to the east, to the Adaes."¹

Later in the same document the statement is made concerning the uselessness of a new villa, not far from San Saba and San Javier, and under the dominion of Coahuila.

Seven years later Governor Ripperdá, in writing to de Croix about certain Indians speaks of them as inhabiting "other islands [extending] as far as the mouth of the Rio Grande del Norte in the colony of Nuevo Santander."²

Having in view this mass of testimony from the inhabitants of the province, and from its civil, military, and ecclesiastical authorities, one wonders at the statement of Bancroft³ that Morfi is unsupported in giving the Medina as the boundary of Texas and Coahuila. If the friar is mistaken, he certainly errs with a goodly company. Bancroft further says that it is hard to determine why the Medina, rather than the Nueces or Hondo, is uniformly spoken of as the boundary of Texas. As we have already seen, it certainly is so mentioned, and uniformly, too, by every writer who speaks of the subject. And when we consider the Spanish method of beginning a new province with a natural boundary near its first settlement, it is not strange that the Medina and Nueces were thus selected for Texas; especially since, when thus restricted, it comprised more territory than any of its neighbors. It is true, in the early days, that the settlements of Coahuila and Nuevo Santander clung to the Rio Grande valley, while those of Texas remained above the Nueces and Medina, leaving the intervening space to the Lipans and Apaches. Thus there was little need for fixed boundaries, and yet these are always expressed in tolerably certain terms. By the close of the century, however, the prospect of clashing land grants bestirred the Spanish authorities to a more accurate delimitation of the three territories involved. By a royal *cédula* of 1805, "the western boundary of Texas began at the mouth of the Rio Nueces, thence up that river to its junction with Moros creek, thence in a northeasterly direction to near the Garza crossing of the Medina river, thence up that river to its source, thence in a direct

¹Representación to Ripperdá, July 7, 1770. Historia 28, Archivo General.

²Ripperdá to de Croix, April 27, 1777. Historia 28, Archivo General.

³*North American States and Texas*, I 604.

line to the source of the San Saba river, thence northwesterly to the intersection of the 103rd meridian of west longitude and the 32nd parallel of north latitude, thence northeasterly to the intersection of the Red River by the 100th meridian, thence down said river."¹

In more carefully delimiting the western boundary of Texas, the Spanish authorities at Madrid were but following the general limits that had been recognized for nearly a century. Our old friends, the Medina and the Nueces are still much in evidence. A map by Humboldt, appearing about the same time and following the same general lines, was later used in the compromise of 1850.

By the transfer of Louisiana to the United States in 1803, a new factor was introduced into the solution of Texas boundary questions, and one destined seriously to change the royal utterance of 1805. The United States immediately set up the claim that Texas belonged to Louisiana—a claim, it is said, inspired by the wish of Jefferson to extend our frontier to include the site of La Salle's colony, "the cradle of Louisiana."² But, whatever may have been the source of the claim, it certainly was untenable, for it utterly ignored the Spanish right by virtue of the occupation of Texas from 1715 to 1762—a thing not done by the French, from whom we bought the territory. At any rate, Mr. J. Q. Adams, our secretary of state, was glad to resign vague claims to Texas in return for a more substantial title to the lands of Florida. What had been the subject of fruitless claim, the United States later tried to obtain by purchase from Mexico. Adams, when president, sent Poinsett with instructions to obtain as much of Texas as possible, by proposing a series of boundaries of which the Rio Grande was the most westerly, thus passing greatly beyond the old limits of the province of Texas.³ His efforts, however, were unavailing. Jackson sent by the United States *chargé d'affaires*, Butler, an offer of an extra half million, if the boundary were extended to the Pacific.⁴ His labor was equally fruitless. The Mexican authorities were too

¹THE QUARTERLY, I 14.

²Jefferson to M. Bowdoin, July 10, 1806. Quoted in *Mexique et le Texas*.

³Von Holst, *Constitutional History of the United States, 1828-46*, 553-554. Bancroft, *Mexico*, V 322.

⁴Von Holst, *ibid.*, 566.

proud to sell and too well versed in their own rights, derived from the Spanish occupation of the territory in question, to acknowledge the vague claims of the United States, based only on La Salle's luckless voyage. The claim of the United States, however, had succeeded in one great purpose, and that was in creating the impression amongst our own citizens that in the cession of our claims to Texas, we gave up something to which we were justly entitled. Certain public men gave utterance to this opinion, and their belief has survived even to our day. The proud persistence of the Mexican government in refusing any reasonable proposition for the purchase of this territory, tended to increase the intensity of this feeling.

While diplomacy, backed by untenable claims and boundless resources, was attempting its unfruitful task, a movement was taking shape that promised to result in a more definite and permanent solution of the whole question. It was the coming into Texas of the Anglo-American pioneers—the same stock that had crossed the Alleghanies, conquered the Northwest Territory, and made inevitable the sale of Louisiana to the United States. Flushed with these successes, they came to add, on the plains of southwest Texas, another chapter to the history of their romantic achievements.

In 1821 Mexico became an independent power, of which, under the Constitution of 1824, first Nuevo Leon, Coahuila, and Texas, and then Coahuila and Texas alone formed a single State. In this dual state the department of Bexar was to include the territory of the former province of Texas.¹ The union of these provinces was a return to the historic connection that had existed between them previous to 1725, and was doubtless designed to neutralize the effects of the Anglo-American immigration, then beginning to make itself felt. Very likely it was thought that Coahuila, as the older and stronger of the two, would lead her sister province through the various processes of Spanish-American development into complete Mexican statehood. But in the department of Bexar there was now an element that strongly objected to leading of any sort, unless it were itself in the saddle, and facing toward the American Union.

For the most part there are but few references to boundary questions during the years from 1821 to 1836, but these uniformly follow the lines laid down during the previous century. In 1824 a

¹Constitution of Coahuila and Texas, Art. 7.

proclamation concerning some stolen goods is issued for the information of the inhabitants of Laredo and other places belonging to the State of Tamaulipas (Nuevo Santander).¹ The authorities of Bexar grant land and acknowledge sales on the Cíbolo, the Atascosa, and the Medina; but there is no record of such transactions being legalized beyond the Nueces.² The *alcabala* records of the same period, and even up to the eve of the Texas Revolution, contain the names of residents of Laredo, in the State of Tamaulipas, who pay duties on goods introduced by them into the city of San Fernando.³ These few extracts will serve to show that the Mexican inhabitants of Bexar still recognized the claims of Tamaulipas to territory as far as the Nueces. Bustamente⁴ says that few Anglo-American settlers did the same during this period. As a matter of fact none of their earlier grants, nor either of the departments largely settled by them, extended far enough to the west to make them interested in the matter.

In 1834 Colonel Juan N. Almonte was commissioned by Santa Anna to visit Texas and to report upon its readiness for statehood. In the description of his journey to Texas, he has occasion to say that "the most disagreeable part of the journey is the space that intervenes between the Rio Grande and Bexar," still an unsettled wilderness—the roaming ground of the Lipans and Apaches—as had been reported a century before. But long ere another century should pass a far different report of this region could be given.

Almonte's utterance upon the boundary of Texas is interesting:

"Notwithstanding that up to the present it has been believed that the river of Nueces is the dividing line between Coahuila and Texas, for so it appears on the maps, I am informed by the government of the State, that in this an error has been committed by the geographers, and that the true boundary ought to commence at the

¹Proclamation of Gasper Flores, first *alcalde* of San Fernando, September 20, 1824. It should be noted that since the independence of Mexico several of the new States have dropped the names formerly imposed by their Spanish conquerors.

²Bexar Archives. Petition of Francisco Ricardo, July 30, 1833 and *alcabala* records for 1833 and 1834.

³Bexar Archives. Entries for José Basilio Benavides, September 24, 1834; Gregorio García, January 13, 1835; Lorenzo Benavides, March 31, 1835.

⁴*El Nuevo Bernal Díaz del Castillo*, I 11.

mouth of the Aransas and follow it up to its source; and from there, it ought to continue in a straight line, until it meets with the river Medina, where it is joined to the San Antonio; following then by the eastern margin of the same Medina as far as its source, it ought to terminate in the boundaries of Chihuahua.”¹

A point to note with reference to the above boundary, is that the information upon which it is based is obtained from the authorities of the State. At that time it was well known that Texas was anxious for separate statehood, and no Mexican authorities would be likely to extend her limits more widely than was absolutely necessary. Still it is well to observe that the boundary, as reported by Almonte, does not differ materially from that laid down in the royal *cédula* of 1805 and in other sources quoted.

During this period the attention of foreign writers is turned toward Texas, and a few make mention of its boundaries. Arthur Bertrand² speaks of the Nueces as forming a part of the western boundary of Texas and of separating it from Coahuila. A French writer reviewing Mary Austin Holley’s *Observations* quotes from that author the fact that Texas is bounded “on the west, by the river Nueces, which separates it from Tamaulipas and from Coahuila.”³ These excerpts, as well as the report of Almonte, seem to indicate that the Medina was gradually losing, at least in the popular mind, its distinction as the boundary line between Texas and Coahuila. The Nueces was beginning to serve as the northeast limit for both Tamaulipas and Coahuila. Later, in their contention with the American government, the Mexican authorities claimed only to this river.

From this time on the march of events is rapid. The early days of 1836 behold the declaration of independence by the Texans, the massacres of the Alamo and of Goliad, and the battle of San Jacinto. The Texan settlers had exercised the Anglo-Saxon privilege of revolting, and with an unusual measure of success. The victorious leaders took advantage of the presence of so important a cap-

¹*Documentos Para la Historia de Mexico*, 4th series, V 22. When one remembers that, at that time, Chihuahua extended far to the east of the Rio Grande, there is nothing peculiar in the terminus of the above boundary.

²*Bulletin de la Société de Géographie*, vol. 8, Paris, 1827. Printed in *Documentos para la Historia de Mexico*, 1st series, vol. I.

³*Ibid.*, 1833, in *Documentos*, etc., 2nd series, vol. VI.

tive as Santa Anna to exact conditions regarding the western boundary of Texas. The Mexican troops were to retire to the other side of the Rio Grande, beyond which the Texans agreed not to extend their western limit.¹ On the 19th of the next December, the Texas legislature, at its first session, passed the following act:

"Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the Republic of Texas in Congress assembled, That from and after the passing of this act, the civil and political jurisdiction of the Republic be, and is hereby, declared to extend to the following boundaries, to wit: Beginning at the mouth of the Sabine river, and running west along the Gulf of Mexico, three leagues from land, to the mouth of the Rio Grande, thence up the principal stream of said river to its source, thence due north to the 42nd degree of N. latitude, thence along the boundary line as defined in the treaty between the United States and Spain," etc.²

Thus within a few short months the documentary testimony of more than a century was cast aside, and Texans made the first definite claim to territory bordering on the Rio Grande. In the conflict between stubborn adherence to authorities of the past and the manifest tendency of the present, the former had begun to give way. Within the limits given above were included portions of four Mexican provinces to which Texas did not have the shadow of a claim, for Santa Anna had promptly repudiated his agreement with Burnet, as soon as set at liberty, while the Mexican government had never recognized it. The Texans might, with as great a show of justice, have extended their boundary much further to the south and west, as they did after the ill-fated Santa Fé expedition. For the present, however, they contented themselves with claiming all the territory as far as the river that offered the best line of demarkation for all this vast region.

During the nine years that followed neither side did much to make good its claim to the disputed strip of territory. There were border raids back and forth, such as the Santa Fé and Mier expeditions and the Mexican occupation of San Antonio in the winter of 1842-43. But these served only to continue the question as an open

¹Agreement between Santa Anna and President D. G. Burnet, Art. 3rd; also secret treaty of same date, May 14, 1836.

²Act approved by President Houston December 19, 1836. Kennedy, *Texas*, I 10.

one. During the decade the only Texas settlement across the Nueces was "a little ranch, inhabited by Mr. Kyney and Mr. Aubri," who acted as double spies for both Texans and Mexicans. The territory between the Nueces "neither by act nor by right could be included in Texas."¹ However, a French writer of this period, Frederic Le Clerc, gives the boundaries of Texas as laid down by the Texan Congress, and severely criticises Mexico for stubbornly refusing to recognize the young Republic. He also criticises sharply the colonization methods of the United States and its modest assumption that its citizens are but the chosen instruments of Providence in the settlement of this boundary dispute and the other questions involved.²

The manifest destiny of Texas was speedy union with the United States, and this event was consummated in 1845. The title of Texas to the territory that she claimed had been identified with her independence and when the United States had recognized this, it must recognize her title also.³ This fact had caused much bitter feeling on the part of Mexico towards the United States, which, upon the annexation of Texas, culminated in the severance of diplomatic relations between the two countries. War, however, can hardly be said to have commenced at that time. Some radical act of aggression must first be committed by one party towards the other, and that act the administration of Mr. Polk speedily committed. While any portion of Texas territory was in dispute good diplomacy, as well as international courtesy, should have prevented the sending of any troops into the portion in question. The Mexican point of view upon this question seems very strong. The occupation of the disputed territory by the troops of General Taylor can only be explained by recurring to the idea that Texas owned the territory as far as the Rio Grande. This opinion was founded upon two distinct beginnings; one, the declaration of the Texas Congress in December, 1836; and the other, the contention that the

¹Bustamente, *El Nuevo Bernal Diaz del Castillo*, I 11.

²LeClerc, *Le Texas et sa Revolution*, 9, 26, 50. Reprinted from *Revue de Deux Mondes* in *Mexique et le Texas*. Kennedy (I 8) takes a much stronger view in saying, "But these vague authorities [Mrs. Holley and Almonte] are now obsolete with regard to the limits of Texas, which no longer politically united to Mexico, has claimed for itself new, more ample, and more natural boundaries."

³Bancroft, *Mexico*, V 325.

Rio Grande was the original limit of Louisiana. The first, as an argument, was ridiculous, and the second untenable. Neither Texas nor Louisiana extended to the Rio Grande, as was evidenced by the undisputed documentary evidence of more than a century.¹ Moreover, compare the conditions on the Texas border with those on the Canadian border a few years previous. Would not Great Britain have regarded the introduction of troops by the United States into the disputed region on the Maine border, while the boundary was still unsettled, as a deliberate act of war and have taken measures accordingly?²

Surely, with so much of documentary evidence on their side, the Mexican writers have had ample justification for the above complaints. The territory was still in dispute and the United States should still longer have refrained from any hostile movement, such as its occupation by troops. Surely, with even a smaller favor than that afforded during the intervention of 1867, we could have obtained by purchase, from a grateful people, all the territory we now possess formerly belonging to Mexico. By the logic of events, however, we were forced into an unjust war, from which we were to emerge with a reputation for land-grabbing, destined seriously to interfere in all our subsequent relations with our Spanish-American neighbors. One would not willingly reverse the events of our history, still less would one wish to restore to Mexico the territory we then wrested from her; but this acquisition will remain in our history one that we may well wish to have been otherwise made.³

By this sketch the author, relying upon such documentary authorities as he has at his disposal, has hoped to trace the beginning and development of the southwest boundary of Texas, largely from a Spanish and Mexican point of view. In this manner he has tried to add some new features of interest to an old and time-worn subject. The problem of the boundary resulted in a contest between a weak power, relying upon documentary evidence, with a powerful neighbor engaged in blocking out its natural limits from ocean to ocean. Such a contest could have but one ending; but it is no more than just to admit that from a documentary point of view, the logic of Mexico's position was irrefutable.

¹*Guerra entre Mexico y los Estados Unidos*, passim.

²Bustamente: *El Nuevo Bernal Diaz del Castillo*, I 11.

³See note 1, p. 81.—EDITOR QUARTERLY.

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